

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-07 COME-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 SAJ-01

STR-04 /088 W

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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2042

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMCONSUL MANDALAY

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 RANGOON 2654

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BM, UN

SUBJ: PHAN HEIN VISIT -- AN ANALYSIS

REF: RANGOON 2391

1. SUMMARY: THE PHAN HIEN VISIT WAS SUCCESSFUL FROM BOTH THE BURMESE AND VIETNAMESE VIEWPOINTS, AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF BURMESE-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS ARE GOOD. THE BUMESE WERE PARTICULARLY PLEASED WITH VIETNAMESE ASSURANCES ABOUT NOT EXPORTING REVOLUTION, TAND THEY NOW VIEW THE SRV AS AN IMPORTANT FORCE HELPING TO CONTAIN CHINA. THROUGH THE PHAN HIEN TRIP, THE
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VIETNAMESE SEEM TO HAVE ADDED DIPLOMATIC STATURE TO THEIR ALREADY

FORMIDABLE MILITARY REPUTATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND TO THE EXTENT THEY REMAIN MODERATE THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE REGION IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO GROW. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THIS WOULD NECESSARILY BE HARMFUL TO U.S. INTERESTS, AT LEAST IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER POSSIBLE TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IN THE WAKE OF OUR INDOCHINA DEFEAT. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

2. THE SPECIFIC ELEMENTS DISCUSSED DURING THE PHAN HIEN VISIT HAVE BEEN REPORTED THROUGH OTHER CHANNELS. BRIEFLY, THE VIETNAMESE:

--EXPRESSED STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT AND ENCOURAGED BURMESE SUPPORT FOR IT;

--SAID THEY ALSO SUPPORT ASEAN SO LONG AS THERE ARE NO FOREIGN MILITARY BASES PERMITTED IN ITS MEMBER COUNTRIES;

--DISCLAIMED ANY INTENTION OF EXPORTING REVOLUTION OR ARMS;

--PROCLAIMED THEIR DESIRE TO ESTABLISH TRADE RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES;

--EMPHASIZED THAT THEY ARE IN THE PROCESS OF BUILDING A PROSPEROUS AND POWERFUL COUNTRY AS WELL AS A PROLETARIAT STATE; AND

--REACHED AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE WITH THE BURMESE ON RECIPROCAL AIRLINE LANDING RIGHTS IN HANOI AND RANGOON.

3. THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE VISIT WAS FRIENDLY, EVEN CORDIAL. THERE WERE NO APPARENT DISAGREEMENTS. BURMESE OFFICIALS SEEM PLEASED WITH THE VISIT, AND PHAN HIEN'S DEPARTURE STATEMENT WAS VERY WARM IN TONE.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BURMESE-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS

4. BURMESE-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS HAVE BEEN FAIRLY GOOD FOR SOME TIME, ALTHOUGH VERY LIMITED IN REAL CONTENT. THE BURMESE WERE NEUTRAL DURING THE WAR, BUT THEY SHOWED CONSIDERABLY MORE SYMPATHY FOR HANOI THAN FOR SAIGON. HOWEVER, FOLLOWING THE NORTH VIETNAMESE
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VICTORY, LIKE OTHER SOUTHEAST ASIANS THE BURMESE WERE WORRIED THAT A REVOLUTIONARY, UNIFIED, AND POWERFUL VIET-NAM WOULD QUICKLY BEGIN SUPPORTING COMMUNIST INSURGENCIES ELSEWHERE IN THE REGION, AND THE BURMESE ALREADY HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH TROUBLE IN CONTAINING THE BURMESE COMMUNIST PARTY (BCP) REBELS. CONSEQUENTLY, ACCORDING TO ONE ASTUTE OBSERVER OF THE LOCAL POLITICAL SCENE WITH GOOD SOURCES IN THE GOVERNMENT, THE GUB DEVISED A THREE PRONGED STRATEGY TO :

--PROMOTE FRIENDSHIP WITH THE VIETNAMESE;

--URGE THE SRV'S MORE POWERFUL ALLIES TO HELP RESTRAIN ANY
VIETNAMESE TENDENCIES TO ADVENTURISM; AND

--STRENGTHEN THE ARMED FORCES JUST IN CASE.

5. THIS SPEARS TO BE THE STRATEGY THE BURMESE HAVE IN FACT BEEN FOLLOWING. IT MAKES GOOD SENSE FOR THEM. FROM THE BURMESE POINT OF VIEW, THE PHAN HIEN VISIT WAS USEFUL IN FURTHER DEVELOPING FRIENDLY RELATIONS, PARTICULARLY COUPLED, AS IT WAS, WITH THE VISIT TO VIET-NAM OF TRADE MINISTER U HLA AYE AND THE CONCLUSION IN HANOI OF A TRADE AGREEMENT, REPORTED TO BE THE NEW SRV GOVERNMENT'S FIRST TRADE AGREEMENT WITH ANY COUNTRY. (ALTHOUGH THE TRADE AGREEMENT PROBABLY HAS LITTLE IF ANY REAL ECONOMIC CONTENT, IT IS POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT.)

6. THE MOST IMPORTANT RESULT OF THE PHAN HIEN VISIT FOR THE BURMESE WAS THE HOPE IT GAVE THEM THAT THEIR EARLIER FEARS OF SRV SUPPORT FOR THE BCP WERE NOT JUSTIFIED, AND THAT VIET-NAM MAY IN FACT HELP TO CONTAIN FEARED CHINESE EXPANSIONISM SOUTHWARD. A SENIOR BURMESE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL WHO WAS INVOLVED IN TALKS WITH THE SRV DELEGATION TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE VIETNAMESE SO FAR APPEAR TO REPRESENT A LESS MILITANT, LESS VIOLENT FORM OF COMMUNISM FROM THAT ESPOUSED BY THE VARIOUS INSURGENCIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, INSURGENCIES GENERALLY SUPPORTED BY THE PRC. HE SAID IT MIGHT SERVE THE PURPOSE OF "CONTAINMENT" BETTER TO HAVE A MODERATE COMMUNIST FORCE PROVIDING THE BULWARK THAN TO HAVE THE KIND OF FORCE WHICH JOHN FOSTER DULLES HAD ATTEMPTED TO SET UP. HOWEVER, HE ADMITTED SOME CONCERN ABOUT WHETHER CHINA WOULD BE INDEFINITELY "CONTAINED" EVEN BY A "MODERATE" VIET-NAM. (THE AMBASSADOR REMARKED THAT THIS MIGHT DEPEND IN PART UPON THE DISCRETION DISPLAYED

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BY THE RUSSIANS AND THE VIETNAMESE -- IF EITHER OF THEM APPEAR TO BE PUSHING AN ANTI-CHINESE POLICY TO FAR, THE CHINESE MIGHT BE IMPELLED TO COUNTER-ESCALATE ITS SUPPORT OF REVOLUTIONARY FORCES IN THE AREA.)

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 RANGOON 2654

7. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, WITH THE IMPORTANT PROVISIO THAT SRV
POLICIES REMAIN MODERATE, PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF
FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE BURMESE AND VIETNAMESE SEEM GOOD.
THEY HAVE NO CONFLICTING INTERESTS AND HAVE A GREAT DEAL IN COMMON,
INCLUDING:

--SHARED CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE EXPANSIONIST TENDENCIES OF
THEIR MASSIVE NEIGHBOR TO THE NORTH;

--LONGSTANDING POOR RELATIONS WITH THAILAND (WHICH BOTH MAY
CURRENTLY WISH TO IMPROVE);

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--A SORT OF PHILOSOPHICAL HOSTILITY TOWARD AND SUSPICION OF
THE WEST FOSTERED BY SIMILAR COLONIAL ZSPERIEANCES;

--A THIRD WORLD-ORIENTED ECONOMIC OUTLOOK;

--FAIRLY SIMILAR DOMESTIC SYSTEMS (AT LEAST IN THEORY) BASED ON
MARXIST SOCIALISM; AND

--A NEUTRALIST APPROACH TO RELATIONS WITH THE GREAT POWERS
(THOUGH THIS IS BY NO MEANS CONFIRMED IN THE CASE OF THE SRV-USSR
RELATIONSHIP).

8. JUST WHAT FORM THESE FRIENDLY BURMESE-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS WILL
TAKE IS HARD TO SAY. WITH THEIR GENERALLY NON-COMPLEMENTARY ECONOMIES

,
TRADE PROSPECTS ARE POOR, ALTHOUGH BURMA MAY BE ABLE TO SELL THE SRV
SOME MORE RICE (IF IT CAN PRODUCE ENOUGH). BOTH ARE TOO POOR TO
GIVE SIGNIFICANT AID TO ONE ANOTHER, AND THERE IS NO REALISTIC CHANCE
FOR MILITARY CYCLEWOBION. POLITICALLY THEY WILL PROBABLY FIND THEM-
SELVES ALLIED ON MOST GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES, AND SINCE THE
VIETNAMESE WILL CERTAINLY BE THE MORE ACTIVIST OF THE TWO THEY MAY
WELL INFLUENCE THE BURMESE (ON SUCH ISSUES AS RELATIONS
WITH ASEAN, FOR EXAMPLE).

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

9. WITH THE CLEAR VIETNAMESE EFFORT DURING THE PHAN HIEN TRIP BOTH
TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM THE SOVIETS AND TO REASSURE THEIR
NEIGHBORS THAT THEIR

INTENTIONS ARE NOT HOSTILE, THEY SEEM TO HAVE ADDED CONSIDERABLE
DIPLOMATIC STATURE TO THEIR ALREADY FORMIDABLE MILITARY REPUTATION.

ERIOUS DOUBTS ABOUT HOW LONG HANOI'S GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY WILL
LAST QUITE RIGHTLY PERSIST; BUT TO THE EXTENT THE VIETNAMESE
THROUGH MODERATE BEHAVIOR ERASE THESE DOUBTS OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS.
THEY MAY RETAIN AND EVEN BUILD UPON THEIR IMPROVED POSITION IN
THE REGION.

10. IN TERMS OF U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, A REGIONAL
STRUCTURE COMPRISING A MODERATE VIET-NAM ON REASONABLY GOOD
TERMS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS WOULD BE ABOUT AS GOOD AN OUTCOME AS
WE COULD HOPE FOR IN THE WAKE OF OUR DEFEAT IN INDOCHINA.
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TO THE DEGREE THAT THE PHAN HIEN VISIT WAS A STEP IN THIS DIRECTION,
IT COULD BE A PLUS FOR US AS WELL AS FOR THE VIETNAMESE
AND THE NON-COMMUNIST SOUTHEAST ASIANS. THE BIG "IF" IN THE
SITUATION, OF COURSE, IS WHETHER THE VIETNAMESE SEE THEIR CURRENT
MODERATE FOREIGN POLICY AS MERELY A TACTICAL PHASE TO BE IMPLE-
MENTED WHILE THEY CONSOLIDATE THEIR STRENGTH FOR A RENEWED OUT-
BURST OF REVOLUTIONARY ZEAL, OR, MORE OPTIMISTICALLY, WHETHER IT
REPRESENTS A MORE PERMANENT DESIRE FOR PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, MEETING DELEGATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MartinML
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976RANGOO02654
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760294-1246
From: RANGOON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t1976074/aaaaadgf.tel
Line Count: 274
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 RANGOON 2391
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MartinML
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 MAY 2004 by ElyME>; APPROVED <01 SEP 2004 by MartinML>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PHAN HEIN VISIT -- AN ANALYSIS
TAGS: PFOR, BM, VN, UN, (PHAN HEIN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006